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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MINSK 000365

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DEPT FOR DS/EUR/EX, DS/IP/EUR, EUR/EX, EUR/UMB
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/15/2016

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [BO](#)

SUBJECT: BKGB USES COLD WAR TECHNIQUES TO GRAB POLITICAL
ACTIVIST

REF: A. (A) MINSK 331
[1](#)B. (B) MINSK 332

Classified By: Classified by Ambassador George Krol for Reasons 1.4(B,D
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[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Belarusian security services seem to have employed old tools of the trade to silence a senior opposition activist, Vyacheslav Sivchik. On March 23, unknown persons impersonated Embassy local employees and possibly used falsified diplomatic plates to abduct Sivchik. They then severely beat Sivchik and threatened to kill him before delivering him to a local police station. Sivchik was hospitalized later that day with a concussion from the beating. On March 29, while police attempted to detain Sivchik as he was being discharged from the hospital to recover further at home, Sivchik managed to escape with the help of supporters, family and journalists. Sivchik is now in hiding. Post has accounted for all of its vehicles at the time of the abduction, and is sending a diplomatic note to the MFA requesting an investigation into this incident. End summary.

[1](#)2. (SBU) According to an affidavit written by Vyacheslav Sivchik (sent to the General Prosecutor's office, the U.S. Embassy, the OSCE Mission, and the Czech Embassy), information his mother told to EmbOffs, and the independent press, on March 23 at approximately 1700 hours Belarusian Popular Front member Sivchik received a call from a woman falsely claiming to be Post's Protocol Assistant. At the time Sivchik was leading a demonstration in which activists had pitched tents on October Square protesting the previous week's rigged presidential election. The woman on the phone claimed that Ambassador wanted to meet Sivchik. When Sivchik said he had no way to safely leave the square, the caller told him a U.S. Embassy vehicle would come for him. A few minutes later a vehicle, reportedly with diplomatic plates identifying it as belonging to the U.S. Embassy, pulled up along the square. However, a traffic policeman told the driver to keep moving. The car soon returned, and a woman from the crowd approached the vehicle on Sivchik's behalf. The driver told her he had been sent by the Embassy for Sivchik. The crowd then formed a human corridor leading to the car for Sivchik, in order to protect him from arrest by waiting police. Sivchik entered the car, which drove off.

[1](#)3. (SBU) The car went around the block and stopped near the Zhuravinka restaurant on International Street. A minibus with dark-tinted windows pulled alongside of the vehicle, five to six armed, masked persons got out of the minibus and pulled Sivchik from the vehicle, transferring him back to the minibus. As the bus pulled away the masked men started

shouting threats at Sivchik. They repeatedly told him they planned to shoot him in the forest near Minsk. Sivchik wrote that on several occasions they even put a pistol to his head.

As the minibus approached a police station the men started beating Sivchik severely about the head, back, and arms. Two other cars started to follow the minibus, which Sivchik claimed led to his captors arguing whether they should shoot him immediately. Instead they delivered him to OMON officers in the Minsk Central District police station. Sivchik stated in his affidavit that he believes his abductors were Russian MVD officers.

14. (SBU) As a result of his beating Sivchik was delivered to a hospital, where he was diagnosed with a concussion of medium severity. He remained in the hospital from March 23 to March 29. On the 29th his doctor reportedly stated he was not fit to be arrested and ordered that he return home for convalescence at least until March 31. Despite this ruling, two police officers came to the hospital while he was being discharged and attempted to arrest him for violating Article 156 of the Administrative Code (petty hooliganism). A number of friends, family and journalists who were also at the hospital blocked the police from reaching Sivchik, who jumped into a waiting car and drove off.

15. (C) On March 24, Sivchik's wife came to the Embassy inquiring about the whereabouts of her husband. She indicated there was a confirmed report by a traffic policeman that a vehicle bearing U.S. Embassy diplomatic plates picked up her husband on March 23. On March 29, a tearful Galina Sivchik, Vyacheslav's mother, spoke with Ambassador and DCM. She confirmed that her son had recognized the voice as that of the Embassy's protocol assistant and therefore did not suspect a ruse. Mrs. Sivchik suspects the services used

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electronic devices to replicate the assistant's voice, which they undoubtedly have on tape. Her version of her son's escape is that he was released to his younger brother, Konstantin and both are now in hiding from the police in a secret apartment.

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16. (SBU) Post has already confirmed that none of its vehicles, private or official ever went to the square to pick up Sivchik. In response to the allegations that the U.S. Embassy was involved in Sivchik's abduction and subsequent beating, Post has drafted a diplomatic note to the Belarusian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The text of the diplomatic note is as follows:

The Embassy of the United States of America presents its compliments to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus and has the honor to inform the Ministry of the following.

The Embassy would like to request the Ministry's assistance in providing information with regard to an incident, which allegedly occurred on March 23, 2006. According to the Interfax Information Agency, a vehicle with diplomatic plates belonging to the U.S. Embassy in Minsk drove by the site of a demonstration on Octoberskaya Square and picked up an individual. The article stated that the vehicle stopped in front of the square and an individual identified as Viacheslav Sivchik got into the vehicle and was driven away. This report indicated that an officer of the state road police (GAI) had confirmed to the Interfax Information Agency that the vehicle belonged to the U.S. Embassy.

The content of this report has had deep repercussions. On March 24, 2006, the wife of Viacheslav Sivchik came to the embassy to inquire as to the whereabouts of her husband. She indicated that there was a confirmed report by a GAI officer that her husband had been picked up at Octoberskaya Square on

March 23, 2006 by a vehicle bearing diplomatic plates belonging to the U.S. Embassy. On March 28, 2006, the embassy received a declaration from Viacheslav Sivchik himself describing the events of March 23, 2006. In his declaration, Mr. Sivchik claims that he received a phone call from an individual claiming to be a representative of the U.S. Embassy and that the U.S. Ambassador, George Krol wanted to meet with him. The caller told Mr. Sivchik that a U.S. Embassy vehicle would wait for him by the square. Mr. Sivchik then claims that a short time after the telephone call, a vehicle bearing diplomatic plates drove up to the square and he got into it. The vehicle then allegedly drove around the square to International Street near the Zhuravinka Hotel. At that point, Mr. Sivchik claims that a mini bus with armed, masked men drove up alongside the vehicle, which then stopped and he was transferred to the mini bus. Mr. Sivchik claims that the armed, masked individuals beat him severely about the head and arms and threatened his life.

The U.S. Embassy in Belarus has no involvement whatsoever in these events. No one from the U.S. Embassy attempted to contact Mr. Sivchik to set up a meeting with Ambassador Krol. All U.S. Embassy vehicles have been accounted for at the time of the incident, and there is no question that the vehicle in which Mr. Sivchik was allegedly picked up was not a U.S. Embassy vehicle. The Embassy requests with expectations of a swift response, an explanation and any information regarding this incident that the Government of Belarus may have at this time.

Given the very serious security concerns this event raises, the Embassy also requests that the pertinent authorities investigate whether or not a diplomatic license plate assigned to the U.S. Embassy was either stolen or fabricated in an attempt to perpetrate this incident. Obviously, the illegal use of official diplomatic license plates poses a serious threat to the safety and security of the U.S. Embassy as well as to citizens of Belarus. In light of the global war on terrorism, the United States government takes a very serious interest in the explanation and investigation of this incident.

The Embassy of the United States of America avails itself of the opportunity to renew to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs the assurances of its highest consideration.

Embassy of the United States of America,

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Minsk, March 30, 2006.

End text.

17. (C) This egregious use of dirty tricks is reminiscent of the dark days of the cold war. In particular, the falsification of diplomatic plates raises serious concerns for terrorism or organized crime. Post hopes, but does not expect, that the GOB will be forthcoming with an explanation.

Krol